

Balancing the Equation by YumeArashi

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Summary:

Nancy and Steve work out some questions about their relationship with Jonathan

Balancing the Equation

Author's Note:

homophobia warning, sort of - Steve catches himself about to use a slur out of (period-typical casual homophobia) habit. He does not actually do so, the slur does not appear in the fic, and he is well aware it is not an okay thing to do.

for Asexuality Awareness Week 2017

big thanks to my sister-chan for the idea <3

“Do you think we’re going about this all wrong?” Nancy asked Steve as he pulled out of the Byers’ driveway, both of them waving good night to Jonathan as he waited in the doorway to watch them go.

Steve snorted. “Like I know what the hell I’m doing. Not the guy you want to be looking to for relationship advice, Nance.”

Nancy shoved his shoulder lightly, but she was smiling. “Some help you are. Seriously, Steve. I could have sworn he was head over heels for us. I mean, he looks at me like I hung the moon, and he’s life-and-death loyal to you.”

“He’s gotta be, you don’t make mix tapes like that for your buddies,” Steve agreed. “But yeah, he should be all over you at least, if not both of us. I mean, I’ve done everything I can think of to show I’m okay with it, short of actually telling him ‘hey if you want to make out with Nancy, that’s cool’.”

“Maybe you should. But...” Nancy looked thoughtful. “It doesn’t seem like he’s worried about you, you know? He’s perfectly happy to snuggle with us for a movie or accept a kiss on the cheek in front of you. And whenever I try something he’s not comfortable with, he pulls away but he doesn’t look over at you like he’s expecting you to object, not like he did when we first started including him.”

Steve looked over at her with a fond and proud smile. “Look at you,

all observant and smart. That's my bright girl."

Nancy blushed a little, smiled back just as affectionately and kissed his cheek.

"Okay, so if it's not me, then what's the problem?" Steve wondered. "Can't be he's uncomfortable with the setting, we've been through this at all our places, in the car, with or without parents or siblings present."

"I don't know. Maybe it's me? He's always been a perfect gentleman except for that photo session, and when I talked to him about it, it really didn't seem like he was doing it to be a pervert. At the time I wasn't sure I believed him when he talked about the honesty of the moment, using the camera to capture the things people don't say. But looking back on it, I think he really did mean it."

"You think he's a - " Steve caught himself before the word could pass his lips. Just because it was the only word he'd known for a long time for people like that, didn't excuse his using it. He'd known even then that it was a hurtful word, and he'd used it anyway - he wasn't about to now. He didn't want to be that person anymore. "You think he prefers guys? I...didn't get that vibe? Like, I've never caught him starting at my ass or anything. But maybe I just wouldn't notice? Not exactly used to having a lot of male admirers." He frowned a little. "Am I not attractive to guys? I should be. I got a rockin' bod no matter who's looking. How come I don't have male admirers, Nancy?"

"You're an idiot, Steve Harrington," Nancy laughed. "But no, you're right, I don't get that vibe either. Maybe...he thinks it makes us uncomfortable?" Nancy wrinkled her nose, the theory sounding weak even to her.

"Nah, Jonathan's too blunt for that. Or too clueless, maybe," Steve shook his head.

"Yeah, probably. I don't know, Steve. I don't want to keep pushing if he's not comfortable. But I don't want him to feel left out, either. He's not a third wheel and he's not our sidekick. We should be including him."

"Well, no hope for it, guess we'll just have to talk to him and ask," Steve looked unenthusiastic about the idea.

"Guess so."

"So, we just want you to be happy and comfortable and included," Nancy finished, giving Jonathan's hands a gentle squeeze. On his other side, Steve's hand tightened on Jonathan's shoulder as he voiced his agreement.

Jonathan stared at his and Nancy's joined hands, embarrassed. "I don't know why," he mumbled. "I'm not worried you'll be mad, Steve, not anymore. I'm not worried someone's gonna see us, I'm not weirded out by being at either of your houses. I just...don't know. You're both amazing, both gorgeous. I'm nowhere near either, I'm stupidly lucky to have both you want me even so."

"But?" Steve prompted rubbing Jonathan's back.

"But I keep freaking out over nothing. I don't know how else to explain it. I'm fine when we pile together on a couch for a movie, I'm okay with what we're doing now, I like the little kisses and the hugs and backrubs and when Nancy plays with my hair, I love all that. But the minute it feels like it's becoming something more, I can't deal." He laughed bitterly. "God, how fucked up am I? I'm fine with *literally* sleeping together, but figuratively..."

"Hey, man, you're not fucked up," Steve told him, leaning forward to wrap his arms around Jonathan.

"There's nothing wrong with you," Nancy agreed, putting her arms around him as well. "Maybe it's just nerves, maybe it's something else. But no matter the reason, it doesn't mean anything's wrong with you. We love you just the way you are. And if that means you never sleep with us in anything but the literal sense, we're fine with that."

Steve nodded agreeably, "Sure, Nancy and I can just get it on when you're off doing oth- ow, Nance!"

"It's okay Nancy," Jonathan said as Steve rubbed the shoulder she'd punched. "I appreciate the thought but you guys don't have to stop having sex just because I'm not comfortable with it. Long as you're not doing it right in front of my face, I don't mind. Can't feel left out of something I wasn't comfortable joining in."

"it's not just about making you feel left out, though," Nancy told him gently. "You're just as important to both of us as we are to each other. We don't want you to feel like you're some kind of lesser part of this equation, because you're absolutely not."

Jonathan smiled and squeezed her hand. "Have I mentioned you're amazing? Because you really are."

"We have the best girlfriend," Steve agreed happily, even though he was still rubbing his shoulder.

"Look, it means a lot to me, what you said," Jonathan said earnestly.

"It does. But I don't feel that way now, even though I haven't done any sex stuff with you guys and you have with each other.

Honestly, if we just kept going the way things are, I'd be okay with that."

Nancy gave him a thoughtful look. "Okay as in, really okay? Or okay as in just saying you're okay to make us happy?"

Jonathan looked sheepish. "Fair question. But really okay." He looked down at their joined hands. "Honestly, I feel...kinda relieved. That's pretty fucked up, huh."

"No, it's not," Nancy told him. "Not everyone has to be a horndog teenager. There's nothing wrong with you if you don't want to do this right now. Or if you don't want to do this at all, ever."

"You know, when we were worried about you, I wondered if you didn't like girls. You know, I thought maybe you liked guys instead. But maybe actually you don't like girls or guys? Is that a thing?" Steve wondered.

"That'd mean I didn't like sex at all. Everyone likes sex," Jonathan looked dubious.

“Maybe not,” Nancy smiled. “Maybe we just don’t hear a lot about the people who don’t, because they’re like you, ashamed to admit it because they think there’s something wrong with them.”

Jonathan hadn’t thought of it like that. “I guess?”

Nancy hugged him close. “Whatever you do or don’t like, whether you just need time or won’t ever be interested, it doesn’t change how we feel about you. We still love you as much as we love each other. We don’t need sex for that.”

Jonathan put an arm around each other them, pulling them against his chest as he struggled to swallow around the sudden lump in his throat.

Somehow, he didn’t feel so broken anymore.